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THE BURMESE SCENE

POLITICAL HISTORICAL PICTORIAL

by

MAURICE COLLIS

The well-known author and authority on the Far East

A
JOHN CROWTHER
PUBLICATION

*The publishers are indebted to the Ministry of Information
for their practical interest in "The Burmese Scene"*

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CHAPTER I

SOME BURMESE LANDSCAPES

THE countries on the main of Eurasia have all, at one time or another, been entered either by barbarians from the steppe or by the armies of their neighbours. Yet some have been little molested, and have gone their own way, secluded and happy, cultivating their own soul. Burma is an example of such a country. Lying between the vast populations of India and China, it is remarkable that neither of these great states swallowed her in the course of the three milleniums of their history. Her geographical situation is the chief reason for this immunity.

Dividing her from India is one of the most formidable natural barriers in the world. The barrier is mountains, not just a range of mountains, but a great waste of parallel ranges, neither high nor snow-clad, rocky nor precipitous, but ridges tangled with impenetrable forests. Between them are valleys, each with its river to drain off the wettest downpour on earth, sparsely inhabited by savage tribes and infested with wild animals and malarial mosquitoes.

This barrier begins in the region of Akyab, that little port on the Arakanese coast of Burma, of which the British public knew nothing before this war. We had even forgotten that it belonged to us until we heard it was ours no longer. Its position is some miles inside the frontier mountains on a jut of land, to the south of which is the mouth of the Kaladan, one of the many immense rivers of Burma, brown with mud, tidal and fringed with mangrove, those growths of hard-wood which rooted in the salty slime have trunks contorted in shapes of agony, but leaves the colour of our willow, a cloudy green, silvery when the wind blows, so softly beautiful that beneath their canopy should be pasture or lawn, not the marbled swamp on whose surface sprawl crocodiles, and lesser broods of nightmare like fishes with legs and

slugs so horrific that in comparison our garden crawlers are sweet and homely.

That is Kaladan mouth, a description which fits the mouths of most Burmese rivers. The Mayu, the Lemro, the Irrawaddy mouths, the mouth of the Tenasserim—to name a few—are such places of ooze and reptiles and waving greenery. But on the north side of the Akyab jut is open sea and a long beach of finest sand. Here the Bay of Bengal spills itself, no common bay, for it is an ocean a thousand miles broad. It spills in ocean rollers, long billows which come coursing from far out, their booming so rarely still that in memory it seems perpetual. Above the strand are palms, and also casuarina trees, which resemble the pine, though are not of their family. The wind, misty with scud, complains everlastingly among their needles, a sound more melancholy than is heard in our pines, perhaps because the landscape disposes to nostalgia; for the Western traveller it is such a lonely shore, past bearing remote and forlorn and lost. At sundown a scene of fantasy is played there. At the instant the sun plunges into the sea, spreading to the zenith fingers of gold, there issues from their holes to landward a host of scarlet crabs. These are unlike our crabs, since they have tall horns with white knobs, nor do they go crouched and slowly, but stand straight on their legs, as if on stilts, and charge over the sand at the speed of a man running his hardest. As you look, the yellow beach to furthest eyeshot is swept by their red battalions. In wide arcs, ebbing and flowing at speed, they wheel by the margin, following the waves' retreat and giving to their advance, as if in a ballet. What is exciting them that they act thus I could never learn, for they show no sign of searching for food. When the sunset is flaming its highest, their redness is doubled by the reflection, for so intense is such a sky that it may turn even the sea rufous and the grey sand maroon. With

the fall of dark they cease their gyrations and set to moulding tiny balls of sand, arranged so that at daybreak the whole shore is covered with designs, which you see are *simulacra* of the palms above, drawings with a line as liquid as a master's. My window once opened upon that shore, and very often I used to walk there.

If from this seascape we turn inland, we come presently to palustrine rice-fields, a scene repeated on all the plains of lower Burma. In the early monsoon they are a flooded waste chequered by the embankments which enclose each field. The villages are like islands; they stand on rising ground. Their houses are of bamboo lattice, two-storeyed pavilions embowered in fruit trees. The figures in the landscape are men and buffaloes. The men wear cotton jackets cut in the Mongolian fashion, skirts tucked up, and enormous bamboo hats. The buffaloes are harnessed to wooden ploughs. Knee deep in water they churn the mud of the field. It is not ploughing in our sense, but the mingling of the elements, earth and water.

Round this plain of husbandry the mountain barrier curves, cutting it off so drastically from the plains of India that only in fine weather and by hugging the coast is it possible to pass from one country to the other. When our forces last year advanced to Maungdaw they took the coast track, but so difficult was it to bring up material over the countless rivers here flowing from the foothills, so narrow was the space between mountain and sea, that, as we know, they could not maintain themselves, and had to withdraw behind the barrier. They will not be able to re-enter in adequate force until our Navy and Air Force can land them safely south of the mountains.

From Arakan the barrier mounts north-eastwards to the top of Burma, where it joins the southern spurs of the Himalayas, a distance of six hundred miles. It is sometimes called the outer Mongolian wall, for it seals away

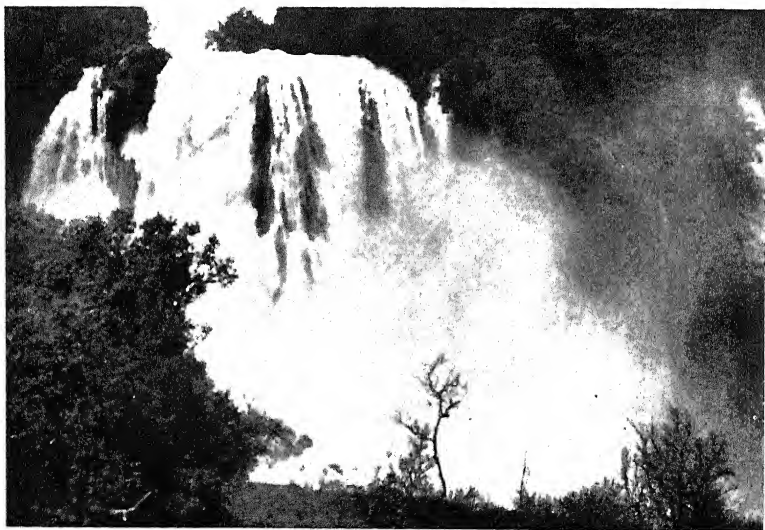
the Mongolian world of the Far East from the Middle East of the Indian continent. There is no route through it, nor has there ever been. At most a few tracks straggle over. In the long course of Indian history no army of conquest has set out to cross it, though the Burmese on occasion penetrated to Manipur on raiding expeditions. We shall learn whether under modern conditions our forces can march that way to the re-occupation of Burma. They managed, indeed, in 1942 to escape by the Manipur track from the Japanese pursuit, but to return as an invading army would tax all their resources. Whatever may happen in the future, this barrier's existence in the past allowed the Burmese, who even to-day do not number more than twelve millions, to maintain their separate identity on the border of a population of hundreds of millions.

Their protection from the hordes of China to the east of them was also due to natural features, but of a rather different kind. There is no insuperable difficulty about entering Burma from China; a route suitable for mules has always been used by the traders of both countries, the same route which in our day has become the Burma Road. In the thirteenth century an army of Kublai Khan, the Mongol Emperor of China, used that route, and succeeded in taking the then Burmese capital, Pagan. But though the destruction of the Pagan dynasty by the Mongols was an epochal event in Burmese history, it had not the results with which we are here concerned. It neither led to a lengthy occupation by the Mongols nor to the influx of a Chinese population. Burma was too great a way from the centres of that population. Though no barrier comparable to that on the west existed, vast spaces of plateau intersected by mountain ranges lay between. These were inhabited not by Chinese, but by half-civilized hill tribes, who had plenty of space in which to live. Distance it was which



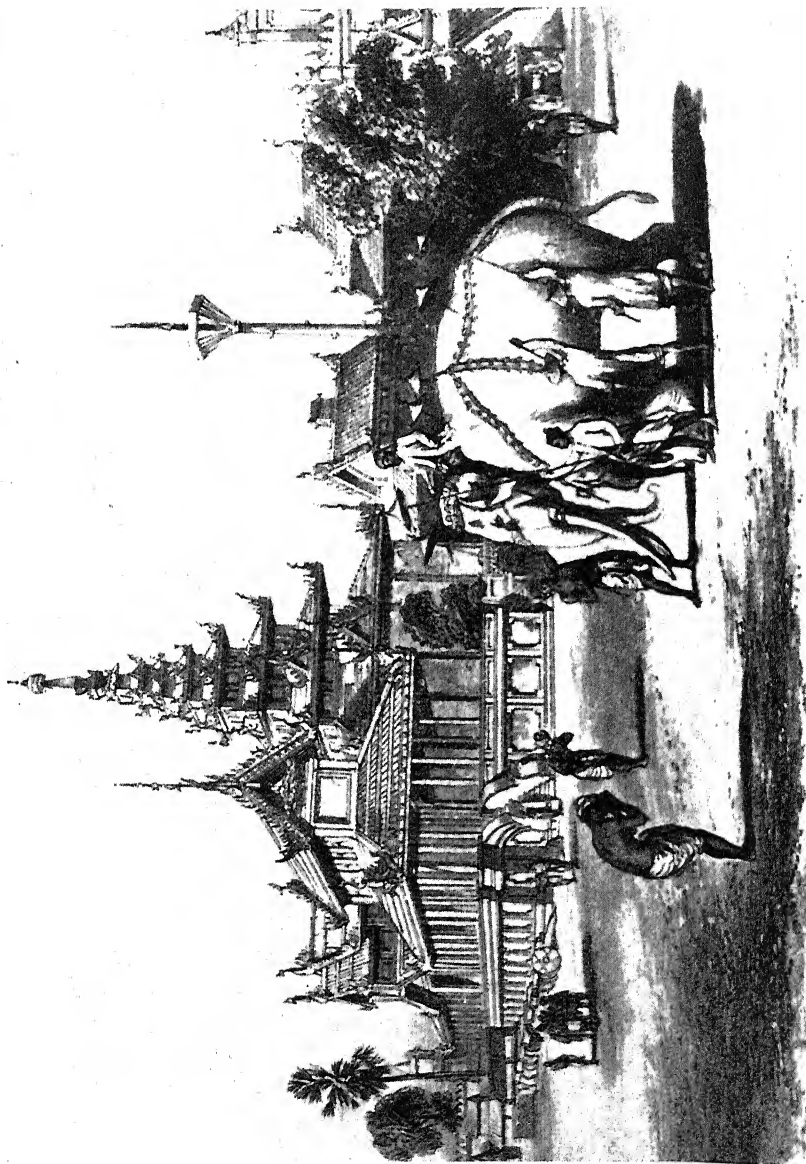
[Chinese Official Pictures.

A SECTION OF THE BURMA ROAD

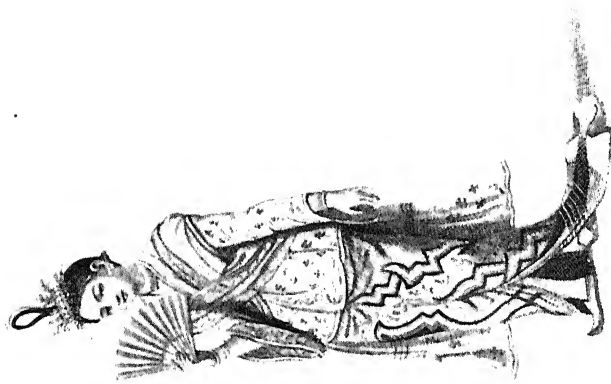


[By courtesy of Mr. Leitch

A WATERFALL IN THE SHAN COUNTRY OF BURMA



THE WHITE ELEPHANT IN THE COURTYARD OF THE PALACE AT AMARAPURA



COURT COSTUMES OF A MINISTER AND HIS WIFE, EIGHTEENTH-NINETEENTH CENTURY



AN OFFICER OF THE ARMY OF KUBLAI KHAN, FROM A FRESCO IN ONE OF THE
PAGAN PAGODAS

protected Burma in this quarter. As long as her government remained quiet within its boundaries and showed its respect for the Chinese Emperor by sending presents, she was in no danger whatever from her giant neighbour.

These two factors of a barrier to the west and great distances to the east made Burma an enclave between the Middle and the Far East, in which her people were able to develop their particular culture. Though that culture partook both of the Indian and the Chinese, it was distinct from both, being less ritualistic and serious than the first, less practical and ordered than the second. The great central plain between the Irrawaddy on the west and the Shan plateau on the east was the seat of the culture. To the north of that plain is Mandalay, at its south Pegu. That is the heart of Burma. The various capitals were all in that area; it is there that the scene is most characteristically Burmese. So immemorial is its air that the landscapes I shall now describe are not only as I saw them, but much as they have been for hundreds of years.

The first is a landscape with buildings, the palace-city of Mandalay. Though this was built as late as the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Court moved there for astrological reasons from nearby Amarapura, its plan closely resembles that of previous capitals. One may obtain a general view of it from Mandalay Hill, an eminence immediately outside the walls. The city lies on dead level ground, a square, each side of which measures about a mile and faces one of the four quarters. The outer periphery is a moat, where in season the white and red lotus blow. Within the moat-square is a greensward, from which, directly, the walls stand up to thirty feet, their dull red bricks weathered and soft. They are battlemented and endorsed at intervals with towers, not of brick but of teak-wood, in form like pavilions, airy and fragile. The gates are eight in number, each a cleft in the wall, with a gate-house above and roofed in tiers.

To them lead bridges, white and balustered. These debouch some yards to the right of the gateways, which are protected in front by a detached wall, so that to enter one must turn from the bridge-head sharp left and then right. Before 1885 the interior of the city was divided into two parts, the outer, where lived officials, and the inner, in the north-eastern quarter, which was the king's palace. This still stands, a cluster of wooden pavilions, the main audience hall looking east, a forest of lacquered pillars, topped with a lofty gilded spire. Behind is a sequence of private throne-rooms from which open chambers, some decorated with a glass mosaic, in others the panels carved and gilt. The place has an air both fanciful and rustic. It is so unsubstantial, so riotous with carving, the roofs soar upward as if taking flight; yet the rooms are like barns, of the greatest simplicity; there are no staircases, no metropolitan artifice, but plainness everywhere, and little comfort. The rugs and cushions, mats and hangings, which were the chief furnishings, have gone long since, as have the gilded coffers and low tables. We also perceive the scene bare of its inhabitants, the king and queen, hieratic creations, and the many ladies, their hair looped or coiled or hanging, wearing wide-sleeved jackets and flowered scarves, skirts slit to a knee and trailing on the ground, brocaded and rustling loudly as they paced with slow steps, their voices pitched to the court language, an elaborate palaver, highly ornate, a sort of poetastry, which euphemized every common event, a stylized patter of honorifics, enriched with chanted terms from the classic Pali. These figures, their language and costumes, have been preserved for us in the Burmese historical drama of to-day. Many a night under the moon have I watched ghosts of the palace on a village stage, the ministers face-downward before His Majesty, as they used to be when he sat enthroned in his hall of audience, and queens, princes, astrologers,

guardsmen, shadows of the grantees who once ruled Burma.

The kingdom was organized as a congeries of village tracts looking directly to the crown without the interposition of an aristocracy. Having an impression of the palace, if we now view a rural landscape, we shall have glimpsed the two main elements of the Burmese scene. Such a landscape was the rice-plain of Akvab in the rains, but this time we will take a village in Upper Burma in December, when the crop is piled on the threshing-floors. It is early morning. The sun has barely reached the top of the palm trees, toddy-palms which may be tapped for a liquor, like beer. The air is fresh, even chilly, and scented, the sky cloudless and there is no wind. Dust of the previous evening has settled; the atmosphere is washed clear as if by the dew. Though December it is like a dawn in our June, but much drier, with scents more pervasive and a light in comparison of a dazzling brightness. In the middle of the empty stubble fields is the village, surrounded by a fence of dried thorns. Outside is a threshing-floor deep with rice-straw, which cattle are treading, urged on by small boys. Under tamarinds, knarled massive trees with small fern-like leaves, women are cooking pots of rice over wood fires; bullocks unyoked from carts are munching, bells tinkling at their dewlaps; and brown dogs are asleep in last night's ashes. The cartmen are in a group by themselves, their heads wrapped against the morning chill, and silently smoking white cheroots. On higher ground to the left is a monastery, a teak building of one storey in a garden of flowering shrubs, jasmine, and that curious tree called the *tayok-saga*, with its white flowers and brittle wood, that snaps at a touch, yet drips with milky sap. A gong sounds sweetly and from the monastery gate issue figures in single file, robed in yellow, their heads shaven, their feet bare, and clasped in front

of each a black lacquer bowl. These are Buddhist monks setting out to beg their daily food, the practice of the first disciples of the Blessed One. Slowly they cross the stubble by a winding track, their eyes cast down, and enter the village. At the first house they halt, waiting in silence. A woman sees them, and comes with rice and curried vegetables. Without a word, and without any recognition from them, she puts one spoonful into each monk's bowl, an act of charity and of reverence. The yellow figures move away in file, and go from door to door till their bowls are full. The eyes have not been lifted, and no word has been spoken either by the monks or by the people. The spectacle is re-enacted at dawn the next morning. It has been daily seen since the beginning of Burmese history.

CHAPTER II

AN HISTORICAL PANORAMA

THE Burmese era dates from March A.D. 638. At that time the Burmese people were one of several Mongolian tribes living in the area afterwards called the kingdom of Burma. They had migrated into it from the northern plateaus on the borders of Tibet and Yunnan some hundreds of years earlier. Among the other tribes, the Arakanese had gone to the west coast and the Talaings to the south coast. The Burmese settled in the middle. By A.D. 850 they were organized as a little state, with their capital at Pagan on the Irrawaddy river about fifty miles south of its confluence with the Chindwin. Though small in numbers and backward in culture, they were destined to become the paramount tribe and their capital to be the capital of the whole country.

The most advanced of the Mongolian tribes were the

Talaings, whose capital was at Thaton on the coast west of Moulmein. For many centuries there had been Hindu settlements dotted along the coast. Contact with these people civilized the Talaings, who became—or many of whom became—Buddhists of the Hinayana church, that is to say, the school which looked on the Buddha as an historical personage and founded its practice on the early Buddhist texts, a simple, less ritualistic, more apostolic type of religion than the later school, the Mahayana, now centred in Tibet, wherein the Buddha is a deity among a company of lesser deities.

The Burmese took the first important step towards their destiny two hundred years after the founding of their capital, Pagan. One may say, indeed, that their history proper begins with the accession of their king, Anawratha, in 1044, twenty-two years before William of Normandy gave England a wider and more united existence. This king began his reign by constructing an irrigation system which doubled the rice crop. As rice represented wealth, this doubled the power of the state, and Anawratha was able to enlarge his armed forces proportionately.

Culturally, however, the people remained backward, though they had received by way of Assam a Buddhism of sorts. But it was a corrupt form of the faith, and contained rituals and customs which did not appeal to what was best in the national character. As we have said, Thaton of the Talaings was a centre of the purer or more primitive type. In 1056 a Talaing saint, by name Shin Arahan, came up-river to Pagan, his object being to spread the gospel of the Blessed One. Unlike the generality of missionaries, he did not go about preaching, but built himself a hermitage in a grove near the city. Villagers called on him to pay their respects, and to these he expounded the true doctrines. His hearers found them enchantingly beautiful. He showed

quite simply how it was possible to reach that most coveted of goals, salvation.

The day arrived when his disciples took him to Court. The old Chinese Emperors had had a way of visiting hermits in their hills and offering them the throne. For instance, the Emperor Yao (2357 B.C.) offered, it is said, the throne to Hsu Yu, but the recluse declined it, washing his ears immediately in a brook. What Shin Arahan did at the Court of Pagan, though different, amounted to the same thing—the insistence that religion transcends the state of kings. When he arrived at the palace, a prototype of that built later at Mandalay, the king received him in audience and asked him to sit down. In response the monk seated himself on the throne. This act, so startling—it was intended to be startling—convinced Anawratha that his visitor was an authentic saint. Its meaning was immediately perceived—that Shin Arahan had a message which could only be delivered from a throne, as if the Buddha were delivering it from his celestial throne, and which it was proper Anawratha should receive, not as a king, but as a disciple. The king received it as a disciple, humbly kneeling. Shin Arahan expounded the Eightfold Path. This is one of the capital scenes in Burmese history.

The monk had not brought with him copies of the Hinayana scriptures, known as the Tripitaka or the Three Books. As these were clearly indispensable if a clergy were to be instructed, he suggested to Anawratha that Manuha, the king of Thaton, be asked to spare one of the thirteen sets he was known to possess. The request was conveyed to him in the politest terms. But he refused to let the books out of his kingdom. To Anawratha it seemed a matter of life and death. Manuha had no right to withhold the true faith. That he did so proved him an unworthy guardian of the Three Books. If ever war were justifiable, this was the occasion.

The following year Anawratha marched south to get the Books, an expedition analogous to a crusade. The Talaing kingdom was the richer, but thanks to his irrigation and the care he had bestowed on his soldiers, Anawratha had become the stronger monarch. With his cavalry and elephants he crossed the Sittang river not far from the scene of the recent battle between the British and the Japanese. Thaton was a day's march to the eastward, and he besieged it. After three months it fell, and he secured all thirteen sets of the Tripitaka. So that they could be widely propagated among his people, he obliged all the Talaing monks who could read them—they were written in the classic Pali—to accompany him on his return. And, says the old chronicle, "he chained King Manuha with golden chains and led him away captive. From that time henceforth Thaton was desolate, but Pagan flourished like unto a heavenly city."

This capture of Thaton by the Burmese in 1057 had the same sort of importance for them as had the crowning two hundred and fifty years earlier of Charlemagne in Rome for the semi-barbarian court of Aix-la-Chapelle. The Burmese language was written for the first time, the Thaton alphabet being used. A very remarkable religious era began. The Hinayana form of Buddhism seemed exactly to suit the Burmese temperament. It taught an ideal of conduct which touched the hearts of these agriculturists. Charity, mildness, honesty, content—such were a few of the qualities it enjoined. And it held out the wider hope that those who took right action and realized that the world was not reality but the shadow of it, an illusion, would attain one day, in this life or after re-births, to a perception of real truth, just as the Buddha in his lifetime had done. It was thus possible for any man to reach the Buddha-state, that is to say, a state of enlightenment when he would be the equal of the Buddha.

This philosophy of life and thought, clothed as it was in legends, parables, myths and poetry of great beauty and the most winning charm, so fascinated the Burmese that they rapidly became civilized in a medieval sense, and set to work to turn Pagan into a heavenly city, in the very sense of the chronicle. The outward sign of this was the multitude of religious structures, pagodas and monasteries in particular, which were built in and around the capital during succeeding generations. A Burmese pagoda is not, as our war correspondents of to-day insist on calling it, a temple, but a shrine where a statue of the Buddha sits in a niche; nor are the Burmese clergy priests, but monks who do not officiate at pagodas or anywhere else, but are conceived of rather as a body of men who show by their conduct what right action consists of and who, living retired and freed from life's cares, are able to attain in quietude a state of mind when the reality beyond the appearances of the world may be perceived. The pagodas, as shrines, represent, in their building, acts of reverence towards the Founder of the Religion, and, as places of resort, are a spot where vows of right action may be taken, versicles recited and private prayers said, though these should be rather votive than supplicatory.

The Pagan pagodas were built of brick covered with stucco, which was moulded into figures and ornamentations of the utmost fancy. They have no interior, in our conception of the word, their massive bulk being as it were hollowed, like a cave, to hold an image of the Buddha and a dark circumambulatory. Though made of materials not of the most permanent, the solidity of their structure and the extreme dryness of the climate in that region have sufficed to carry them, but little dilapidated, through nine hundred years into modern times. They are not so imposing or grand as the stone structures of India or Cambodia built at the same epoch, nor have they the

architectural grace of our contemporary Gothic cathedrals, but there is a charm about them, a liveliness, a drollery, a lightness as of festival, which perfectly reflects the character of the Burmese scene. Some are very large, like the Ananda. The collection of so many of them at Pagan, with their leonine gateways, their wealth of figures, their dragonish architraves, their gardens bright with flowering shrubs, made that city the most notable, not only in Burma, but in the thousand miles of country between India and Cambodia. Hinayana Buddhism found there its second home. Driven from India in the sixth century, it had centred in Ceylon, with a diminished following and little apparent future, for vast areas had accepted the Mahayana—China, Japan, Cambodia and Tibet. Now the Lesser Vichicle, as it was called, left its island refuge and again gained foothold on the mainland. That it exists to-day and has continued to extend its boundaries must largely be ascribed to its welcome at Pagan.

The reputation of the Pagan kings was much raised by these events. They were enabled to exert authority over the whole area of Burma proper, including the coastal strips of Arakan and Tenasserim. The map of the Pagan kingdom is very like the map of British Burma. By the twelfth century the Burmese were without rivals in what had been a country split among contending tribes. The future belonged to them, not to the Talaings, the Arakanese, or any of the other Mongolian peoples. Their capital was a place of pilgrimage; they were looked up to as the leading race, and rightly so, because the declared ideal of their government was of the highest, so high that to us in a utilitarian age it seems, but wrongly, to have nothing to do with government. We may quote here from the great votive prayer of King Alaungsithu which he caused to be inscribed in stone in the Shwegu pagoda, the Golden Cave where afterwards he expired

in 1167. It is written in resounding Pali verse, and has been felicitously rendered by Mr. Gordon Luce :

. . . I would build a causeway sheer athwart
The river of Samsara,* and all folk
Would speed across thereby until they reach
The Blessed City. I myself would cross
And drag the drowning over. Ay, myself
Tamed, I would tame the wilful ; comforted,
Comfort the timid ; wakened, waken the asleep ;
Cool, cool the burning ; freed, set free the bound.
Tranquil and led by the good doctrines I
Would hatred calm.

After going on to say that he desires neither state nor splendour nor wealth won by oppression, the king asks that he be remembered only as a disciple of the Blessed One, and on death have the incomparable bliss of communion with the great spirit which one day would manifest itself as a new Saviour of the World, the successor of the Buddha, so that informed by such a Teacher he himself may reach the final enlightenment of the Buddha-state.

Such, to use modern jargon, was the declared policy of the government of Burma in the year 1167 after Christ. It was an ideal, of course, and was never achieved. Yet this Buddhist ideal, given lapidary permanence by Alaungsithu, persisted throughout the whole of Burmese history. No matter what ruffian or wastrel occupied the throne, he dared not renounce it, as ruffianly leaders of our day have dared to renounce the Christian ideal. Indeed, its scope became magnified, and to it was added the conception—how strange it seems to us !—that one day some king of Burma, having attained the final enlightenment, might be discovered to be the long foretold Saviour, not only destined to give his country peace,

*Illusion.

happiness and the knowledge of truth but, becoming Lord of the World by virtue of his innate blessedness, able to bestow those inestimable gifts on all mankind. It is these wide dreaming visions of universal charity which give importance and meaning to Burma's obscure annals.

As was inevitable, the time came when the Pagan dynasty passed away. The melancholy truth in the French saying, *tout lasse, tout casse, tout passe*, is at the very heart of Buddhism. One finds it beautifully expressed in a sentence to be found in the *Glass Palace Chronicle*, the official history of the kings of Burma, where mention is made of a legendary King of the World. "Not even the universal monarch, King Mandhata, sovereign ruler of the four great Islands and the two thousand lesser isles surrounding them, and of the two limbos of the world of spirits, was free from rise and fall, separations and the breach of death." Kublai Khan, the Tartar Emperor of China, sent an army against Pagan, and in the last decade of the thirteenth century the city fell. As we have stated, this did not mean the swamping of Burma by another civilization. Yet the invasion had two results of fatal import. With the defeat of a dynasty which had ruled Burma for two centuries and a half, the country split up again into warring peoples. In particular, the Talaings raised their heads again. The confusion was increased by a further circumstance. The operations of the Tartars in Yunnan, then a Shan kingdom on the Burmese border, had the effect of unsettling the Shans, who migrated southwards. It was at this time that they founded the kingdom of Siam, but they also entered Burma, and for two hundred and fifty years were one of the disturbing elements in a situation characterized by internecine war, unstable governments, retrogression of culture, and destruction of wealth. Not until 1546 was there crowned again a Burmese king of the whole of Burma.

His name was Tabinshweti, and he founded what is

called the Toungoo dynasty. Had he and his successors been content to consolidate the kingdom and follow the Buddhist law of right effort, as detailed in Alaungsithu's great inscription, Burma might have regained the reputation she bore under the kings of Pagan. But though they professed to be ardent followers of the Eightfold Path, the Toungoo monarchs led their country into foreign wars, invading particularly their neighbour Siam, the newly-founded Shan kingdom, which had become a third home for the Hinayana, and as such was regarded by them as their rival. The miseries consequent upon these wars led to growing anarchy. From 1640 onwards the country drifted deeper into turmoil and disunion, with the Talaings again as strong as they had ever been. The Mongolian peoples who between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries had collaborated under the Burmese to create one of the most charming cultures known to history, now in the seventeenth century seemed incapable of unity and of the art of government. Had there been any power on their borders better organized than were they and which was eager for expansion, they would certainly have suffered total eclipse. But, as the next chapter will show, that was not to happen yet awhile, though the world forces destined to bring it about were already in motion.

In the middle of the eighteenth century Burma suddenly threw up a great man, known to history by his title, Alaungpaya, the Divine Incarnation. He appeared on the scene in 1750, aged thirty-five, being the son of the hereditary headman of Shwebo, a village in the upper country, west of Mandalay. His career resembles that of the typical Chinese rebel-bandit, who in time of confusion attracts followers, seizes the throne and founds a dynasty. By 1757 Alaungpaya was master of Burma, having brushed aside the effete Toungoo dynasty and then overcome those elements in the country which had kept it divided for the last century and a half. (His

defeat of the Talaings this time spelled their political extinction). But he lived only three years more, dying in the course of an invasion of Siam. However, so thorough had been his suppression within Burma of the forces of disunity, and so strongly had he impressed his personality on the people, for whom he has ever since been one of the national heroes, that his heirs were able to conserve his bequest until the arrival of the British in 1825, an event which heralded the fate which might have overtaken the country at an earlier period, had not its geography preserved it.

How there came on the scene inhabitants of an island ten thousand miles away is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

HOW THE BRITISH CAME TO BURMA

EUROPE'S attention was first drawn to Burma in A.D. 1300, the year of the publication of Marco Polo's *Travels*. The Venetian was in the employ of Kublai Khan at the time the Tartars took Pagan. It is unlikely that he was with the army, and probably his account of the city is second-hand. He records that it was large and magnificent, and speaks of a royal mausoleum with pagoda spires, coated with gold, from the finials of which hung bells which tinkled in the wind, a very just description of a feature of Burmese architecture then and now.

Two hundred and fifty years were to elapse before Europe was to receive news of Burma again. After the Portuguese discovered the Cape route to India in 1497, they explored the Bay of Bengal, and some of their free-lances took service with King Tabinshweti, the founder of the Toungoo dynasty of Burma. We read that on his invasion of Siam in 1548 he had a bodyguard of four hundred Portuguese, whose morions and arquebuses were inlaid with gold. In 1584 Ralf Fitch,

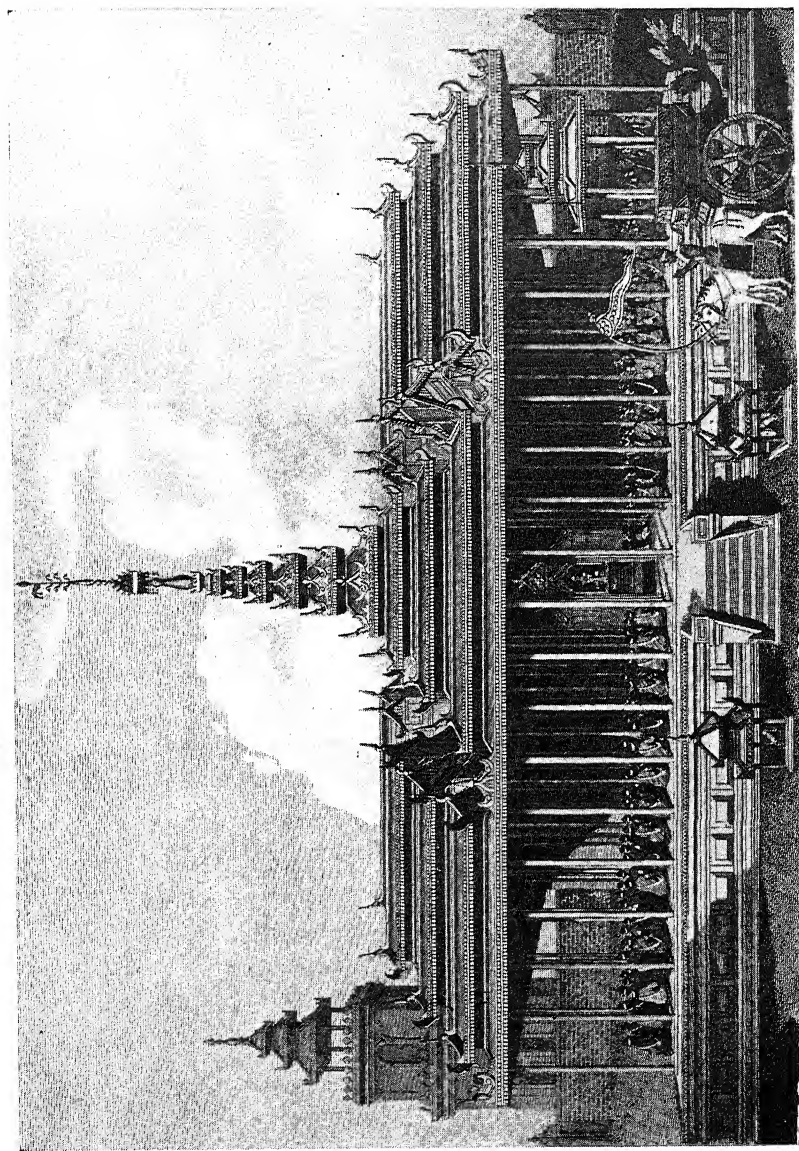
a merchant of London, visited Burma to ascertain her products and enquire about trade. No Englishman had been there before. The third king of the Toungoo dynasty, Nandabayin, was on the throne. It being one of the periods when the country was united, the Court was at its most brilliant. In the account of his adventurous journey published on his return, Fitch declares Pegu, the then capital, to have been bigger than London. "The streets are the fairest that ever I saw," he writes, "as straight as a line from one gate to the other, and so broad that tenne or twelve men may ride a front thorow them"—very different from the streets of the Tudor capital. His description of the moat, the gates, and the wooden palace of carved and gilded teak, is similar to that given of Mandalay in Chapter I, though Pegu was somewhat grander, for the Court was less splendid in the nineteenth than in the sixteenth century. But the countryside was much the same then as now. Take the little glimpse he gives of the monks begging their food: "They demand nothing, but come to the door and the people presently doe give them, some one thing, some another; and they put all together in their potte." And he saw the Shwedagon pagoda, which is fifty miles from Pegu, and which the Englishman of yesterday, as he steamed up the Rangoon river, used to see sparkling ahead of him in the tropic sunlight. "It is the fairest place, as I suppose, that is in the world," wrote Fitch, with an exaggeration which those who have admired it will pardon. Other parts of his narrative might be a description of modern Burma, for the people, their dress, amusements and interests have changed hardly at all. Though they suffered for centuries the evils of unstable rule, these were internal stresses, nor were they acute enough to destroy the culture born at Pagan. So little was the life modified by passing time that when the British entered in the nineteenth century, it was as if by some psychic freak they had broken

back into the Middle Ages. What they saw was surpassingly beautiful. The shock of its beauty produced such books as Fielding Hall's *Soul of a People*, which, though it is depicting the Burmese of the eighteen eighties, has the atmosphere of Pagan and of Alaungsithu's prayer.

Fitch also glimpsed something of the Buddhist world vision. He saw the White Elephant. "When he is washed and commeth out of the river," he writes of the animal's ceremonial bath, "there is a gentleman which doth wash his feet in a silver basin." A White Elephant was one of the Nine Jems, and its possession by a king was held indispensable if he aspired to be Lord of the World and World Saviour. All the great Burmese kings had that aspiration from Alaungsithu onwards. That was one of the reasons why an invasion of Siam had such a fatal attraction for them. For some reason the Siamese seem to have been the luckier at catching white elephants. Theirs was the only Hinayana Buddhist kingdom on the mainland of Asia outside Burma, and having the same Buddhist vision they were necessarily rivals for world lordship. It was essential in the circumstances to deprive them of their Jem. Fitch, though interested in the White Elephant, did not, of course, understand its esoteric significance, nor indeed has it been understood by subsequent writers. But as an Englishman he understood very well what was Burma's chief weakness, and puts it thus: "This king hath little force by sea, because he hath but very few ships."

Ten years after Fitch's return to London, the East India Company was founded. How in two hundred years it established a dominion in India is familiar history. It made various attempts to open trade with Burma. But the strong government that Fitch saw did not last, as we have shown, and the civil wars which followed made commerce difficult and unprofitable. A better opportunity seemed to offer when in the seventeen-fifties the

above-mentioned Alaungpaya's rebellion appeared likely to succeed. A Captain Baker was sent as envoy to Shwebo, the new capital, from the Company's settlement at Cape Negrais on the south coast. As it was known that munitions of war were what the hero-bandit required, Baker brought up a twelve-pounder and three nine-pounders as presents. On arrival in September, 1755, he was admitted to the inner palace without the delay usually experienced at oriental courts. Alaungpaya was sitting in state, wearing a long robe with wide sleeves. A conversation ensued. The victorious rebel had not yet completely united the country, for the Talaings still held out in the south. His first concern was therefore to make sure that the English supported him wholeheartedly, and were not also selling munitions to his enemies. Reassured on this point, he ordered Baker's letter from the Company to be read. It was to the effect that, in return for trade concessions, cannon and muskets would be supplied. The drafting, however, was wanting in tact, for there occurred the phrase: "You will by this means obtain an alliance and friendship with so great a power as the Honourable East India Company, who can send you such assistance as will support Your Majesty's throne against all future rebellions, domestic feuds and foreign enemies." When he heard this Alaungpaya affected a very hearty laugh, in which his officers hastened to join like true courtiers. He was, of course, ignorant of the Company's great resources, and wholly without information about the dynamic island in the far west which had sent it upon its eastern career. All he knew of it was the little settlement at Negrais. The phrase therefore seemed a ridiculous impertinence. "Who do you think I am?" he exclaimed, half-jocular and half-irritated. "And have I asked for your arms? Haven't I already taken possession of the greater part of Burma without the help of your cannon or muskets? Don't think for a moment I require



THE MAIN AUDIENCE HALL AT AMARAPURA, THE BURMESE CAPITAL IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY



SHAN GENTLEMAN FROM THE N.E.

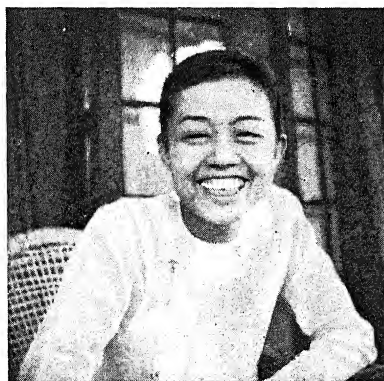


[By courtesy of E. W. Rossiter]

GIRLS OF THE MONGOLIAN TRIBE
CALLED LISHAW



[By courtesy of E. W. Rossiter]
A GIRL OF ONE OF THE MONGOLIAN TRIBES OF BURMA,
THE KARENS



THE BURMESE SMILE, WHICH WE HOPE
TO RECEIVE ON RE-ENTERING BURMA



PLOUGHING RICE FIELDS WITH BUFFALOES



[British Official Photograph.]

A NAGA FAMILY IN THE HILLS DIVIDING BURMA FROM ASSAM.

your friendship and alliance. There is only one chief town left which has not submitted. If my men can't take it by assault, I'll starve it out. You can keep your artillery."

When he had run on in this style for a bit, the Chief Minister interposed, for the Council knew well that the Burmese must have cannon if they were to reduce the Talaings' then capital at Pegu. "These gentlemen may be witnesses to Your Majesty's placing your signet to the contract on your part," said he, coolly enough.

But this only set off the King again. After another mirthless roar of laughter, in which his staff again joined heartily, he shouted: "What sort of a madman wrote that letter of yours?" And drawing his sword, he said to Baker: "Feel the edge of that, Captain. It's blunted, worn, because for three years I have been cutting my enemies down with it. And I shall continue to cut them down. Don't talk to me of assistance! I do not require any. The Talaings, why I can wipe them away like this!" and he drew the palm of one hand over the other.

Baker had been trying to get in a soothing word, but His Majesty would not listen. He grew more excited: "Look at these arms and this thigh!" he cried, pulling his sleeves over his shoulders and tucking up his robe. "Not one in a thousand is my match! I could crush a hundred Talaing kings at a time."

The Chief Minister conceived it was time to close the audience, and knew how to induce his master to do so. Baker was dismissed with the contract unsigned. It was not only the phrase in the letter that was to blame. His Majesty was grievously upset over another matter. There lay dangerously ill a girl he wildly loved, and he was half out of his wits with grief. However, the Chief Minister got round him next day. Baker was summoned to the inner palace again. There the Minister met him with a letter from the King, which began: "Do not take it amiss, Captain, that I cannot grant you an interview.

My indisposition will not admit of it," and went on to say that if the Englishman hastened back and met him later on the road to the south with cannon and muskets, the Company could have all the trade it wanted. A formal agreement would be signed later. Baker galloped away. The King's beloved, it was said, died two hours later.

This little scene is highly revealing, and tells us all we need to know here of Anglo-Burmese relations in the eighteenth century.

The successors of Alaungpaya were of warlike character, and before 1820 had sacked Ayudhya, the capital of Siam, annexed Arakan, which the Toungoo dynasty had failed to do, raided for a time in Manipur and parts of Assam, and thrown back a Chinese army sent by the Emperor Ch'ien Lung. They were entitled by these successes to call themselves the leading military power in Further India. But their victories were not modern in a European sense. It was tribal fighting, hardly differing from the campaigns of the Toungoo dynasty in the sixteenth century. But the Burmese did not know this. They thought they could beat any army. They did not know what had happened in Europe; they had no idea of the progress made by the western world. In this they were not peculiar. No oriental people was better informed; even the Chinese were ignorant of the truth.

During this period the British greatly increased their power in Europe by defeating Napoleon. In the East they had outdistanced all their rivals. The richer part of India was theirs, and they had acquired Ceylon and founded Singapore. They were not, however, imperialist at that time. Their eastern possessions were all managed on commercial lines by the East India Company. Their policy was dividends, not the acquisition of more territory. But they were in the grip of a dynamic movement, the world-wide bourgeoning of the western races. On that movement they were carried forward irresistibly.

Being the rulers of Eastern Bengal, they were on the border of Arakan, which the Burmese had annexed in 1785. At the turn of the century a series of British envoys visited the Burmese Court, their object being to open diplomatic relations so that trade might be furthered. But such ideas were too modern for the Burmese, as they were for the Chinese, to whom similar envoys were sent at this time, and none of the missions had any success. Without diplomatic contact there was no way of arranging what we now call "incidents." These were very frequent on the Arakanese border. In September, 1823, a Burmese armed force seized Shahpuri, an island outpost of Eastern Bengal. When the Governor-General of Fort William in Calcutta protested to Bagyidaw, the then representative of the Alaungpaya dynasty, that monarch invaded Bengal, being convinced he could take Calcutta or, for that matter, England. This happened in January, 1824. The war was very short. The British Navy landed troops where they could strike effectively. Next year King Bagyidaw was obliged to cede his coastal provinces, Arakan and Tenasserim. What Fitch had pointed out two hundred and fifty years earlier was proved true—Burma was defenceless against an attack by sea.

With Arakan in British hands, frontier incidents were no longer possible, and it was not expected that the Burmese would give further trouble. But British policy in the East had become more forward. In 1840 they fought China to obtain trade facilities. Notions of an imperial destiny were in the air. Some imagined all Asia converted to Christianity. In general, the mood was to stand on dignity. The Burmese, for their part, had learnt very little. In 1852 the Governor of Rangoon seized British property to the value of £750. A man-of-war under Commodore Lambert was sent to demand restitution. When he was refused, he sent his broadsides into the city. The second Burmese war had begun.

The Burmese were defeated as quickly as on the first occasion. This time they had to cede the southern half of Burma proper, and so lost Rangoon and the stretch of coast which had remained to them after their previous loss of Arakan and Tenasserim. They were penned into the upper section of the country. Their capital now was Amarapura, near the future Mandalay.

Things were tolerably quiet for the next thirty-three years. But the House of Alaungpaya was clearly tottering. Moreover, it had become entailed unknowingly in the vast web of world politics. The western nations had entered on a match of grab. It seemed that all Asia would be carved up into their colonial spheres. The rump of Burma had no chance of survival. One power or another was certain to have it. For a time it looked as if the French were to be lucky there. In 1884 they seized Annam. They were suspected of the ambition to turn all Further India into an empire, an area nearly as large and potentially richer than the British Empire of India. In pursuance of this plan they sought to bring the King of Burma under their control. He was a weak man, named Thibaw, much influenced by his forceful and capricious queen, Supayalat. The Marquess of Dufferin was then Governor-General in India. The Russians were threatening the north-west frontier. It would be awkward if the French, by occupying the Burma kingdom, threatened his north-eastern frontier at the same time. He decided to anticipate them. Sufficient troops were ready in the half of Burma already British territory. Thibaw was told in October, 1885, he must accept a British Resident, and be guided in his foreign policy by the Indian Government. Without any notion of the broad issues, he refused in a highly provocative proclamation. The Marquess was not surprised. He embarked his troops at once on river craft and sent them up the Irrawaddy to Mandalay. In a fortnight the third

Burmese was was over. All that remained of independent Burma was annexed. King Thibaw and his queen were sent into exile. "What a terribly dramatic ending to Supayalat's greatness! Not even a gold coach to go away in; only a square box of a vehicle, in which she and the King and her mother all crowded together." In these words Lady Dufferin, who visited Mandalay the following year, describes the end of the Alaungpaya dynasty. It was the end, too, of Burma as she had been known during the twelve hundred and forty-seven years of her era.

CHAPTER IV

THE BRITISH IN BURMA

AS we have frequently insisted, the Burma of the eighteen-eighties, in language, the arts, in day-to-day life, hardly differed from the Burma of the fifteen-eighties, and in as far as it did differ from the Burma of the eleven-eighties, the difference was rather of ebb than of flow. When the British took over the government, they found their new charges interested in religion, agriculture and festivals, under head of the last being music, drama, gambling and sports. Decidedly, they were not interested in business beyond the exchange of country produce.

But the British were the greatest business community in the world. They had gone into Burma fully aware that the country invited commercial development. It had two known commodities of first importance, teak and oil; valuable mineral deposits were rumoured to exist. And its rice crop could be multiplied to provide a large exportable surplus, just what was wanted in starving India.

The first thing the British had to do was to pacify the upper country, which as a result of the war was overrun with bandits. This took several years, but by 1890 law and order were being successfully administered by officials

seconded from the Indian services. Burmese life was centred in the villages and went on now much as before, a routine of ploughing, planting and reaping from June to December, the festivals following with their easy gaiety. As funds permitted, hospitals were built in the country towns and the people gradually introduced to medical science. Before the conquest, popular education had been given in the monasteries, and while these were still encouraged, the government set up its own schools, in which some English was taught. With the people quieted and going about their normal avocations, it became possible for London business houses to begin commercial operations. Expert staffs were sent out and labour was imported from India, as the Burmese had little inclination to work anywhere except in their fields.

At this early stage this policy was popular with everybody. It suited the Burmese because they were not bothered, because their lives and property were safeguarded, their religion left free ; it pleased public opinion in England because the plain man felt he was doing his duty towards a backward race by providing it with the advantages of modern civilization ; and it was exactly what the City of London wanted, for it enabled firms to create in Burma an export trade of goods for which there was a keen demand, and to open there a market for English manufacturers.

The development of the country followed this formula. Roads, railways and steamers for inland navigation were built so as to serve the needs of commerce and administration. The demand for Indian labour largely increased. There was no need to spend much on defence because no enemies threatened attack—the Ch'ing dynasty in China was approaching its fall ; the French, satisfied with Annam, Cochin-China and Cambodia, had agreed to let Siam remain an independent buffer-state between them and the country they had once aspired to annex. Burma's wealth rapidly multiplied.

From the Burmese angle, however, it was not wholly a paradise of peace, plenty, toleration and justice. These things were much appreciated at first, no doubt, after the bandits, oppressions and wars of the old régime, but as the years passed and people forgot what Burmese rule was like, they became more critical and noticed that the big money was being earned by foreigners. The capital had been shifted from Mandalay to Rangoon, which was not properly a Burmese city. In it were the British with their officials and firms. Its main population was composed of Indians, not only labourers, but business men, clerks and shopkeepers. The Burmese, it was true, did not care for business, but when they saw that foreigners were growing rich by its practice, they began to wonder whether all was well. But at least they had their lands, and as what most of them really enjoyed was old-fashioned village life, they made little attempt to enter the city, found their own firms, and take their share of the profits. Rangoon was too alien. They could not breathe its air. But that meant turning their backs on the place where the money was.

Their situation was not improved by another circumstance. The Hindu immigrants had been accompanied by their bankers, the Chettyars, a remarkable caste, which besides financing large businesses lent out small sums of money. After a while these men began lending on mortgage to the Burmese landowners; the interest they charged was, perhaps, less than that demanded by the Burmese moneylenders, or perhaps it was easier to do business with them. Whatever was the reason, they got the business. A foreclosure by a Burmese moneylender meant no more than the ownership of an estate passing from one native inhabitant to another, but, if a Chettyar foreclosed, the land went into Indian possession. By 1920 so considerable an area of land in Lower Burma had been alienated to Indians, that the Burmese began

to say that, already excluded from both big and small business by foreign competitors, they were now rapidly losing their one asset to these same foreigners, the soil of their country. What their mountains had staved off for so long was now upon them; they were being swallowed by an alien population, which their white conquerors had brought in by sea.

These evils—they were evils chiefly from the Burmese point of view—were inherent in the system, and could not be charged against the provincial administration alone. At her conquest Burma became part of India, and her people subject to the Government of India. By coming to Burma the Indians were therefore only moving about in their own country. Legally they were neither aliens nor immigrants. The provincial government had no power to restrict their entry, for it was subordinate in such matters to the Government of India, though it would not have done so, had it had the power, because the commercial development of Burma depended on the free flow of labour from India.

In sum, it came to this—the policy of the Government of India towards Burma was Indian and imperial, not Burmese and national. When a measure was under discussion, the question was less whether it would serve the particular interests of the Burmese than whether it accorded with the general system of trade and finance, in which Burma had been incorporated. Moreover, it was assumed that if the Burmese did not benefit directly, they would be indirect beneficiaries, for there would be more employment and higher wages, if they cared to work; an assured and higher price for their agricultural produce; and a larger revenue from which grants could be made for their education, hospitals, roads and irrigation. Burmese opinion was in no way invited, as at that time there were no representative institutions. The Burmese had, indeed, less power to move the British authorities than they had had to move their own kings.

It can be taken, however, that the Government of India was acting in good faith, for its policy was in accordance with the general opinion of the day. Had it thought to protect and nurse the Burmese for a time and refuse to open their country to the free operation of British capital, postponing its development until the inhabitants were equipped to undertake it themselves, such a line of action would have been thought very eccentric and the British electorate would have opposed it. That the policy was honestly held to be reasonable, and was not intended to hurt the Burmese, is proved by the educational programme of the same authorities. Though they had deprived the Burmese of their political independence and were exploiting their country over their heads, they invited them at the same time to read English history and the English classics, and to study economics and political theory. As the books treating of these subjects were full of praise of liberty and fair play, and showed how a modern state should be organized so that the will of its people prevailed, the placing of them in Burmese hands was equivalent to providing unanswerable arguments against the existing state of affairs.

Stated thus, it would appear that a curious confusion reigned in the Government's mind. It had been at pains to organize the administration in a certain manner, yet inculcated ideas of a kind to undermine it. If so, this was typical of the way the British are supposed to conduct their affairs; they do not think in advance, but proceed by intuition.

When the more intelligent of the Burmese had mastered the printed heritage of British liberty, they understood for the first time what had really happened to them, and saw that the conceptions which had made the British what they were could be applied equally to their own case. The rights of man were not only the rights of Englishmen, but the rights of every man, wherever he lived. All that was necessary was to confront the British with their own maxims and show that they had a universal validity.

So began what was called the agitation for reform, and which filled the twenty-five years before the Japanese invasion.

When their own maxims were quoted to them and they were invited to apply them forthwith to Burma, the British were faced with a downright awkward situation. The capital they had invested in development was large. If that capital were to remain safe and bear fruit, rash experiments must be avoided. The granting of indiscriminate powers to the Burmese would endanger the position of British firms which held concessions under lease. But to refuse Burmese demands on that ground alone would have been embarrassing. Fortunately, there was another ground. The Burmese were a people but very recently introduced to the modern world. From the earliest times they had been cloistered, and it was only reasonable to suppose that a certain interval must elapse before they could dispense with British tuition. Such was the reason given for refusing their demands, and it had so much truth in it that the refusal at first caused little resentment, particularly as it was agreed, in earnest of British intentions, that a limited measure of self-government would be granted at an early date and that further grants would be made as Burmese education proceeded.

This programme removed all immediate danger to British financial interests. Burma would remain part of India, protected by the Indian Army and the British Navy, the best possible guarantee against external and also internal hazards.

The reformed constitution of 1921 gave legal validity to these conceptions.

During the following years the Burmese began to press particularly for separation from India, holding their subjection to her government to be the gravest of the several disabilities under which they suffered. That in this regard they had an unanswerable case was conceded by the Simon Commission in 1930. A new

separate Constitution became law six years later, which also transferred to them a greater degree of self-government. Yet, in spite of these relatively advantageous enactments, the anomalies we have sketched went on much as before. British capital continued to control the production and export of Burmese raw materials; Rangoon was, as it had been, an Indian emporium; and the Burmese share in a rich trade still remained largely indirect. This was due to the fact that the Burmese legislature could only proceed according to law. It could not violently disrupt the economic structure. Had it attempted to do so, the Governor, who had reserve powers, would have vetoed the legislation. The leases held by the great firms could not be annulled, and most of them had long years to run. The resident Indians who had acquired rights and property could not be dispossessed. Without annoying India, the chief customer for Burmese rice, it was impossible to take drastic steps about immigration. In short, the reformed legislature was the heir to an economic system which was like an internal growth eating into the national vitals, but which could not be cut out without killing the patient. No wonder there was dissatisfaction and a demand for complete independence.

In addition to this safeguarding of vested interests, Parliament had seen to it that the Burmese legislature should have no control of the armed forces. It seemed in 1939 that British capital was quite secure, for the real danger which threatened it was not foreseen.

CHAPTER V

THE JAPANESE ENTER

THE rise of the Japanese as a modern power dates from 1868, seventeen years before the British conquest of Upper Burma. In 1894 they won a war against China and in 1904 against Imperial Russia, with the help of

arms sold them by England. In 1914 they became British allies, and were rewarded in 1921 by mandates in the South Seas. By 1930 evidence was rapidly accumulating of the vastness of their ambitions and their intention to realize them by force, but the governments of Europe and America continued to supply them with materials of war. The authorities concerned with the Indian Empire, both in London and Delhi, were satisfied that Burma was sufficiently protected by the naval base under construction at Singapore. The policy by which she had been developed exclusively on commercial lines was not modified. Though proposals were made to connect her by railway with India, they were not accepted on the ground that such a railway, very expensive to build, would not pay its way. Inside the country no strategic roads or railways were built to the eastern frontier. No additional troops were stationed there, no secondary naval base was constructed, as might have been done at Kyaukpyu on the Arakan coast, nor were munition factories of any kind established. The country was left wholly defenceless against land attack by a modern power, for it was not believed that the Japanese, the only modern power in Asia, could reach its frontiers over the thousands of miles of territory which lay between.

The crescendo of Japanese aggression then began, the seizure of Manchuria in 1932, the beginning of the Chinese war in 1937, the fall of Canton in 1938, and the seizure of Hainan Island in February, 1939. Though this brought them to the borders of Indo-China, the Government of India still did not move to put Burma in a posture of defence, nor was the sale of war material to Japan interrupted.

The outbreak of the European war in September of the same year exposed Burma to greater risks, for while before the armed forces of the whole Empire could have been sent to protect her in case of necessity, she was now

dependent on such a fraction of them as could be spared, in itself an invitation to Japan to press on. It was not yet too late to have taken some steps to fortify the Burmese frontier and lay down at Rangoon a store of munitions. But no steps of the kind were taken because all eyes were on Singapore, the guardian of the Bay of Bengal and an impregnable naval bastion.

Then came the fall of France in June, 1940, which let the Japanese into Indo-China. The road to Singapore's back door was open. It was the moment of the Empire's greatest weakness. Yet eighteen months elapsed before Japan struck. When she did strike in December, 1941, immediately after America cut off war supplies, Burma, still without what would have given the defence a chance, was overrun in six months.

The loss of Burma will thus be seen to have been due wholly to military and diplomatic deficiencies. As the Burmese ministry had no say in military or diplomatic policy, the responsibility for what happened rests on the British in London, Delhi and Rangoon.

It has been urged by some writers since the catastrophe that had the British Government in Burma raised, equipped and inspired a Burmese army for the purpose of defending its own country, the Japanese would have been beaten back. This appears to me a doubtful proposition. Given the political situation as it existed, it would not have been feasible to raise a Burmese army of sufficient proportions by voluntary enlistment. To have done so by conscription might have precipitated a rebellion, the conscripts themselves going over to the rebels. Moreover, such a move would have presupposed that the British anticipated grave danger, but as we know, this was not the case. Allowing that a Burmese army had been raised, it would have been impossible to train it to a degree of efficiency approaching that of the Japanese forces. In short, it was not in this respect that the British

lacked foresight, but in failing to concentrate in time such trained forces as they did possess.

Other writers have declared on equally fallacious grounds that the blame can in some measure be shifted to the Burmese people, in that they helped instead of hindering the Japanese. But here we must repeat that the loss of Burma was due to military causes. The Burmese were totally unarmed and defenceless. They were no more able than sheep to resist any demand made by the invaders. When the terror of the invasion broke over them they had no idea what to do. No wireless instructions could reach them; they were not organized; there were no trained local leaders. The ordinary man thought of his wife and family, and bowing to enormously superior force, which was not directed against him but his masters, sought to give as little offence as possible. For the criminal classes, for those who had been involved in rebellions against British rule, for the rowdies and every young scoundrel in the place, it was a happy chance to run wild, to rob their own countrymen, murder the Indians, who though unpopular and unwanted were perfectly safe in normal times, and generally to increase confusion to the utmost. But whether such ruffians can be said to have materially facilitated the invasion is doubtful. The Japanese staff did not calculate to defeat the Imperial Army by calling to their aid an undisciplined rabble. The forces they could deploy were ample for the job. Bands of Burmese roughs may have been useful occasionally and for a limited time, but to allege that they affected the course of events is unduly to magnify their importance. Moreover, even if it could be shown that the criminal classes in Burma contributed to the British defeat, it would be as untrue to say that Burmese people in general were their abettors as to allege they were their accomplices in ordinary crime.

Far from seeking to shift any of the blame for our

deficiencies on to the Burmese public, we should deeply commiserate with them in their misfortunes. They were wholly dependent upon us for protection, inasmuch as we had reserved for ourselves that duty. When we failed to save their villages from the flames, when their livestock and grain were pillaged, their whole life disrupted, what sort of a figure did we cut in their eyes? Well, the Burmese are a witty people, and some of the things they said about us must have been very funny. Yet I have been told by officials who escaped, that as they fled in their cars, and right up to the last moment, when they were embarking in planes for India, the Burmese sought to comfort them with every attention and allowed no trace of disrespect to creep on to their indulgent faces. Their religion told them that the British were enduring one of the Eight World Predicaments, and they may well have quoted their ancient saying: "Not even the universal monarch, King Mandhata, was free from rise and fall."

The main events of the campaign have been reported in the press and by those war correspondents who have published books. They are very simple. The Japanese entered Burma by the route which Burmese armies used to take when they marched into Siam to sack Ayudhya. There is a low pass which debouches into the plain of Moulmein. The British stood there, but were soon driven west along the coast road through Thaton, the old Talaing capital, the overthrow of which had caused Pagan to flourish like a heavenly city. Thence they retreated over the Sittang to Pegu, the once royal seat seen by Fitch in its prime. Defeat there obliged them to evacuate Rangoon and to fall back north-westwards to Prome on the Irrawaddy, the place from which in 1885 their fathers had launched their lightning blow at Mandalay. Prome falling, they fought a rearguard action up the Irrawaddy, whose stream had carried British flotillas to the gates of Thibaw's palace and the conquest of all

Burma. On their way, they came to Yenangyaung, the Oil Creek, where London had sunk so much capital and from which it had drawn such large dividends, the place of all others which had made the occupation of Burma worth while. Now they had to put a match to it and watch the money go up in smoke. A few days later they were passing Pagan, its thousand pagodas spread on the torrid plain and recalling old visions of universal Buddhist empire—sweeter, gentler world visions than those which the modern Buddhist visionaries of Japan were now dreaming. Fifty miles further, on the other bank, the Chindwin joins the Irrawaddy, which turns north-eastwards to Mandalay. But this time they were not seizing but abandoning the country, and setting their faces away from the old capital which had once been a British goal, they began their hard march up the Chindwin valley. This took them, after a hundred and fifty miles, to a village from which a track winds over ridges to Manipur. Here, at long last, they shook off the Japanese, and still a disciplined body, escaped from Burma into safety. All in all, they had retreated seven hundred miles. It was one hundred and seventeen years since their nation had first entered the country, and fifty-seven since it had driven out the Burmese King.

CHAPTER VI

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

IT had long been foretold in the Burmese countryside that the British would rule but for a hundred years. Villagers believed that a Burmese king would come again, another divine incarnation, a mortal housing the great spirit, not **only** of a deliverer, but of the long foretold World Saviour. During the last thirty years there were several aspirants to that glorious destiny, but all of them died a rebel's death. In 1930 one such, Saya San by name, whose style was Thupannaka Galon Raja, had

prayed: "May the Guardian spirits of the Religion, the Dragons and the King of Angels sustain me. May I become Universal Monarch of the Four Islands and of the thousand lesser isles adjacent to them." But it was not to be; he was hunted down. When twelve years later the Japanese marched in, inspired by the same vision of universal monarchy, and put to flight his enemies, we can hardly suppose that his old supporters viewed the event with unmixed feelings of pleasure. It was certainly not exactly what they had hoped for. Yet one gathers the Japanese have represented themselves as saviours, though in what mythological terms they have sought to convince old-fashioned Burma of the authenticity of their divine mission, we have no information.

But for us to view recent events through the medieval eyes of Saya San's men or their like is impossible. It is enough here to have made the point that inasmuch as certain sections of the more backward part of the rural population had their own dream of how the British dispensation would end, and as that dream foreshadowed a domestic, not a foreign, deliverer, such people cannot have welcomed the Japanese. Yet I recollect it as a curious fact that in 1930 I was told by a Burmese astrologer that the deliverer would come from without, a belief not generally current, or there would have been no heart to follow Saya San.

But instead of groping in the visionary dusk of legend and poetry, it will be more profitable to consider how a modern Burmese, educated and unbiassed, would view from the perspective of the present year, 1943, the course events have taken and the prospects of the future. Let us imagine him musing on the whole picture here presented. First, what had been the Burmese contribution to the world of thought before the British redcoats came drumming in? He would reply that it had been the preservation of Pali Buddhism, that purest, least superstitious, freshest, most gentle of all forms of popular religion in

the Orient. No doubt the Sanskrit canon of the Mahayana furnished a superior metaphysical flight, but in its popular aspect what a medley of debased rituals it became, until in China, where at first it had been highly estimated, it sank below the notice of educated men. But in Burma the Pali Buddhism of the village could not be looked down on by any man, whatever his culture. That the Burmese in the eleventh century had crusaded to get the documents of this faith, that they had established it firmly, cultivated it through the centuries, that the common people had qualities of mind and character which demanded a faith so simple and good, so opposed to magic, cruelty, pomp and intolerance, all this surely entitled the race to a niche in the history of Asia and of the world, for it amounted to an achievement, difficult to assess in worldly values, yet indubitably precious.

The survival of this faith, unsullied and uncorrupted, into the nineteenth century was facilitated, no doubt, by the seclusion in which the Burmese lived, though the frequent collapse of the central government and recurrent civil strife might be thought of as adverse factors. But the inrush of western ideas after the conquest put its quality to a stiffer test. The British did not interfere with it, but it ceased to be honoured by the Government, being disestablished, as it were, and quietly ignored by authority. Furthermore, it had to contend with the rivalry of Christian missionaries, who had governmental countenance and the prestige of the conquering race. But none of these things hurt it, nor did the widening of the mental horizon, which came from reading western books. The fact is, that apart from its dogma of reincarnation popular Pali Buddhism is largely a code of behaviour. Missionaries and western opinion in general could only commend that code. The Christian dogma of divine revelation given to the Christ did not shake it, for though the Buddha did not claim a divine origin, he did claim that enlightenment had revealed to him the

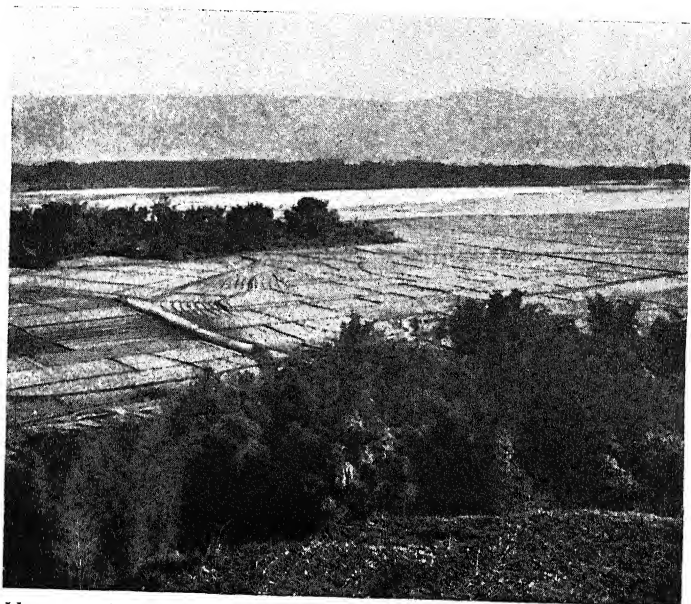
truth. In some ways this concept of the apprehension of truth accorded better with modern western thought than did the established religion of the West. Whatever may be the final explanation, Pali Buddhism succeeded in withstanding the various influences which were brought to bear upon it in the nineteenth century, when the seclusion in which its followers had lived for so long was terminated, not only by the physical entry of the British, but by the intoxicating inrush of a multitude of new ideas.

In further demonstration of this view that the great achievement of the Burmese was the preservation of Pali Buddhism as an active way of life, a modern Burmese might point out that deep in his race's consciousness lay the feeling that it was dedicated to that one aim above all others. Once it had received the message, it set itself to make Pagan a religious capital with great labour and at enormous expense. Its motive for uniting Burma into one state, he would say, was firstly religious, and secondly political. It achieved the conversion to Pali Buddhism of the Arakanese and of the Burma Shans, and was an influence, in conjunction with missions from Ceylon, in converting the Shans who descended to Siam. The more backward Mongolian tribes of the hills were converted wherever they came within its reach. It even succeeded in largely persuading the very numerous Chinese immigrants from Canton who settled in Burma to look on Pali Buddhism as a more desirable belief than the debased Mahayana of their own countryside. The constant efforts of the Burmese to maintain their hegemony in Burma, he would go on, were inspired by their devotion to their religion, while their frequent loss of that hegemony and the civil strife ensuing were due to weaknesses in their character which, serious though they were, did not negative their great passion for the religion. In effect, while failing to distinguish themselves on the political side, and eventually losing their political independence altogether because they

were not clever enough to accommodate themselves to events, they succeeded on the religious side, and are just as strong in that now as they ever were, remaining, as they do, in spite of crushing political misfortunes, the senior guardians of Pali Buddhism on the mainland of Asia.

What then, in its widest sense, was the significance of that interlude in their history when the British occupied their country? This can be stated very simply from the point of view which we are developing. The British taught the Burmese political wisdom, the quality they most lacked; they showed them how to govern a unified Burma, and sketched a world framework into which she might fit so safely that her existence would be protected from external hazards. It is true the British were guilty of two grievous derelictions—in the development of the country they exposed the Burmese too much to the harsh working of the capitalist system and international finance, and they neglected to safeguard them from foreign military invasion. But in regard to the second they are resolved to drive out those who broke in, and they had already sought to atone for the first by the promise of a day when Burma, as an autonomous state, could take her place in a universal comity.

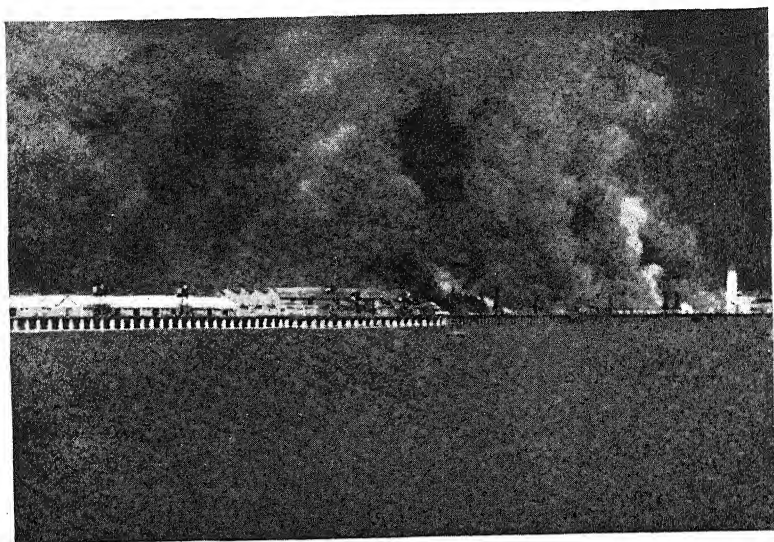
What, then, should the Burmese regard as their principal aim when the Japanese are gone and they have attained a free status? Their history provides the answer to this final question. Instructed by what they have learnt from the hundred years of British rule and the catastrophe which ended it, they should strive to govern a united Burma in such a way as to provide for ever a safe home for Pali Buddhism. Even the vision of a universal Buddhist monarch need not wholly be relegated to the land of lost dreams, for there is no reason, I opine, why they should not show in the ordering of their state such Buddhist charity, toleration and gentleness as to conquer the world by their example.



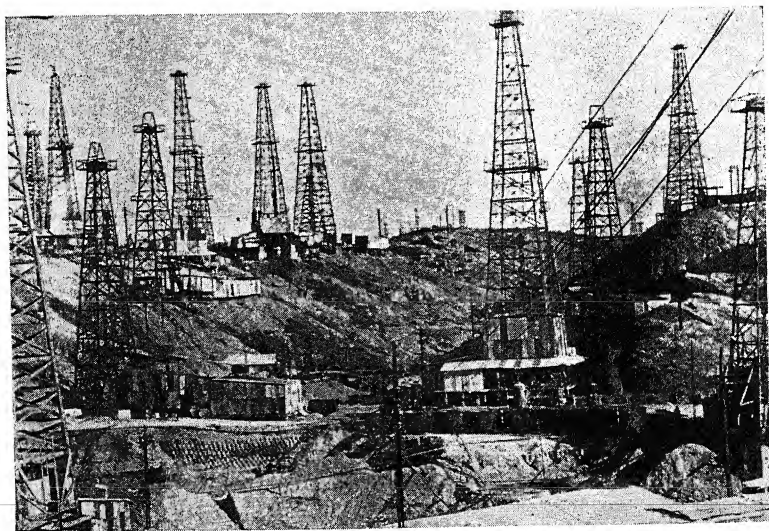
VIEW OF RICE FIELDS AFTER HARVEST AND A VILLAGE IN BAMBOOS
NEAR THE CHINESE FRONTIER



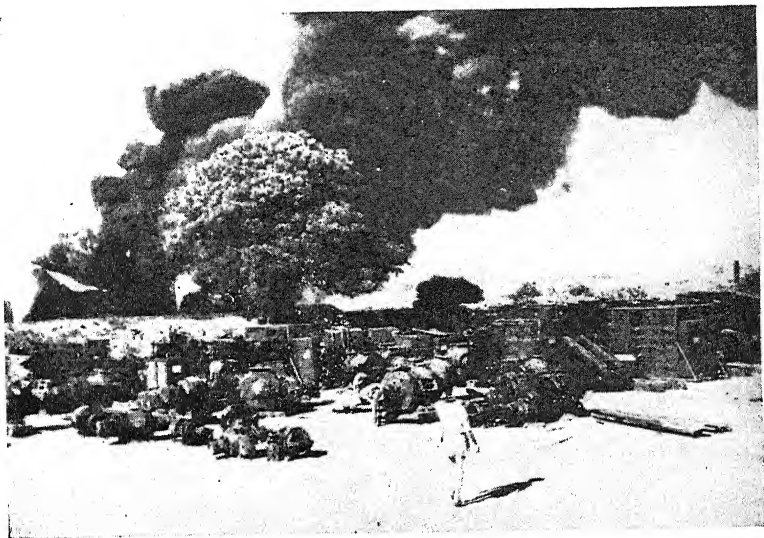
REAPING THE RICE CROP [By courtesy of E. W. Rossiter



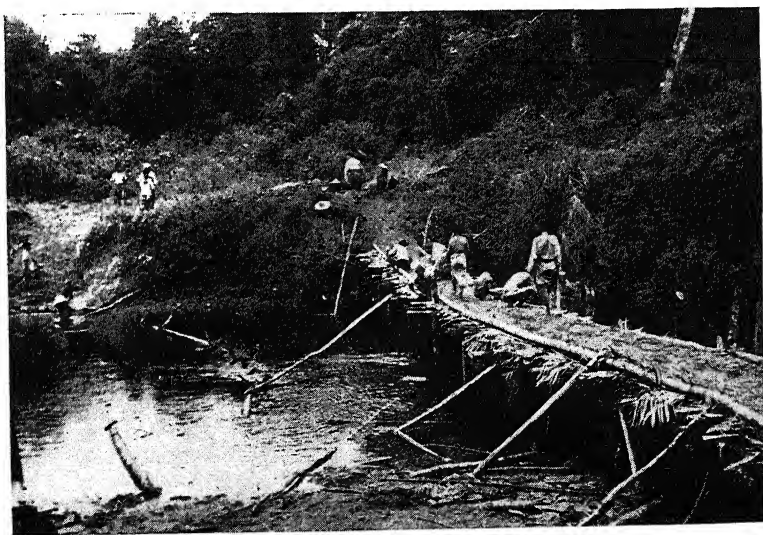
THE RANGOON WATERFRONT SET ABLAZE AS THE BRITISH LEAVE



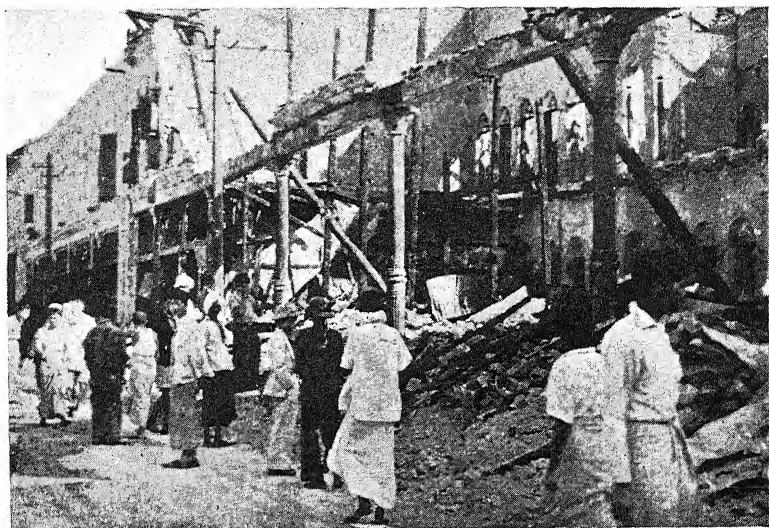
The oil wells at Yenangyaung in Burma, the scene of some of the most bitter fighting between Allied Forces and the Japanese during the Burma campaign.



THE DESTRUCTION OF YENANGYAUNG BEFORE THE ARRIVAL OF THE JAPANESE
 On 16th April the electricity and generating plant at the Yenangyaung oilfields, Burma, was "scorched" by British engineers, and crashed in flames and smoke as Japanese forces closed in. The plant produced power for 85 per cent of the oil production in Burma. Picture shows electrical machinery being dumped in a pit which is about to be flooded with oil and set alight. In the background a blazing oil tank.



BUILDING BRIDGE TO TAKE JEEP ACROSS RIVER IN NAGA MOUNTAINS [British Official Photograph.]



[British Newsreels Picture.]

INDIANS, BURMESE AND CHINESE IN A BOMB WRECKED STREET IN RANGOON
FOLLOWING A JAPANESE AIR RAID



[British Newsreels Picture.]

AFTER A JAPANESE AIR RAID ON AN INDIAN RESIDENTIAL STREET IN AN
UP-COUNTRY BURMESE TOWN

ADDENDUM

By kind permission of the Editor of the "Daily Mail"

WINGATE—CLIVE OF BURMA ?

By Graham Stanford

(Home on Leave from India)

I HAVE just come home from India, and no sooner had I reached England than people began asking me about Wingate—Wingate of Burma. "Tell us about him," they said. "What sort of fellow is he?"

I left Wingate kicking his heels in Delhi only a few days ago—Major-General Charles Orde Wingate, D.S.O. and bar, the man who ran the Japs around Burma for three months. He has certainly captured the imagination of the British public.

I am glad about that. It shows that the British public, with a bloody, full-scale war on their minds far nearer home, can react to a good story—the heroic story of a strange young leader and a band of men who went off into the Burmese jungle to fight a new kind of war against the Japs.

Wingate, given support from above, given the free hand which he needs, may well become the "Clive of Burma." That is what I feel about him.

To conquer India Clive broke all the accepted military rules—outraged the susceptibilities of those whose orthodox training made them boggle at his "rash daring."

Look back at history for a moment. On a sweltering August day in 1751 Clive marched on Arcot from Madras with a detachment of five hundred men. Only two hundred of them were English, and they shared three field pieces of artillery.

Of the British officers who accompanied Clive, six had never been in action, and four were young men in the Mercantile Service who had volunteered for the job.

But all of them had been fired by the enthusiasm of Clive; fired, too, by that indefinable something which makes one man among millions a born leader. You know what happened—Arcot was seized.

NO SUPPLY LINES

We can close the history book now and come forward to a day I remember when Wingate, with a small group of highly trained officers and a band of half-trained men, marched off into the heart of the Burma jungles two hundred miles behind the Jap lines.

There were no supply lines and there was no easy way back. Their food was dropped from the air, and if that failed they knew they would have to live on the country. The wounded or the very sick would have to be left behind. They could not endanger the safety of the rest.

A new war with new and ruthless rules. Before they plunged into the darkness of the jungle the men knew this. Wavell saluted them as they went off. He had sent for Wingate to do this job. After Abyssinia he believed in this man.

They said that Clive was mad, that Clive was "hare-brained," that no good could ever come from such rashness, from such flouting of the ordinary rules of warfare. They always say these things.

I have heard the same things said about Wingate. "Brilliant and brave, but eccentric, if you know what I mean. A fine show, but not—well, not pukka war as we know it. After all, you can't really win like that."

Now you know what happened with Wingate. After three months he marched out of Burma with the majority

of his men, while the Japs were still milling around wondering what had hit the Mandalay-Myitkyina railway in seventy-five places; wondering who had blocked the vital road through the Bongyuang Gorge.

What a grand story this was? It read like something out of the history books. It smacked of high adventure. It smacked, too, of a new design for the defeat of the Japs.

It earned praise even from the strategists of the "hide-bound" school, although I am afraid that—now the tumult and the shouting have died—they may dismiss the campaign as just "a glorious adventure."

It would be a tragedy if that were so, if Wingate were not given scope to develop the type of warfare that he tried out in Burma. For I believe that Wingate—and those men like him—are the men to beat the Japs. And the Japs, remember, are quite a different enemy from the Germans and the Italians.

Wingate is not the conventional Regular Army officer. He does not give a hoot about appearance when he is "off duty." He will slope around with his fair hair curling over his neck, his hands clasped behind his back, and his "red tabs" so grimed that I have seen inquisitive people peer to ascertain the rank of this strange man with the thoughtful eyes.

But Wingate cares one hundred per cent how he and his men dress for the jungle, and there is no greater stickler for detail when it comes to supervising their equipment. He drives his men. He is hard with them. But once a good officer or a good trooper has been with Wingate he would never wish for a better leader.

MAGNETISM

It was the same with Clive. It has been the same with every man who has made a name in British Army history. Most of them have been "mad" in the eyes.

of orthodox military circles. All of them have possessed that personal magnetism which has made men follow them on seemingly impossible adventures.

In jungle warfare—which is largely a war of nerves—we must have men like this; men who can inspire the ordinary unimaginative soldier with the spirit of the mission.

Around him Wingate has a small band of officers who volunteered for the Burma expedition because they believed in him. I knew them all, and they were all under the Wingate spell and likely to remain there!

They were all of the same type—"Mad Mike" Calvert, monocled Bernard Ferguson, who writes as well as he fights, toothless, snuff-taking Geoffrey Lockett—all "slightly odd" in official eyes.

One night in Maidens Hotel, Old Delhi, I heard a Colonel remark: "What a very odd type of young man seems to get commissioned these days."

He was looking at Lockett, who, in grimy bush shirt and with his teeth out, was taking snuff from the old tin box he always carries around with him. Lockett had only just come out of Burma. It was his only bush shirt. And Lockett took his snuff in the face of the Japs!

Wingate, too, is "odd." He will talk to you for an hour without pausing, then get up and shamble off in his squeaking shoes without even saying good-night.

If you go to his room you will find him pacing up and down stripped, dictating reports and stopping every now and then to sniff an orchid.

SOUND SENSE

Yes, odd—but I have heard more sound sense talked by Wingate than I have heard from most people since the war began.

War, literature, philosophy—when he is not fighting, Wingate loves talking and sharpening verbal swords with everyone. “When Wingate comes along some of the ‘old school’ run a mile,” I was told. I am not surprised. Wingate—with typical Wingate modesty—declares himself to be unbeaten in argument!

Wingate is a highly trained soldier who, passing through the usual channels, has emerged with a mind of his own. He knows the text-books as well as the next man; has taken what is good from them and thrown away the bad.

He was not given “crack” troops for the Burma show, and right up to the last there was a danger that the whole thing might be called off. He did not pick his officers.

He was not given special privileges, although it was a rather special job. He had to teach his men how to live and fight in the jungle, and he brought most of them out alive.

He was the first Englishman to fight the Japs as they must be fought; the first leader to show that with daring and resource the Japs can be outwitted.

FIRST VICTORY

I believe that when Wingate came out of Burma in his battered pith helmet, with his shirt in ribbons, he had scored the first victory for Britain against the Japs.

Not a very big victory, maybe, but something that helped to erase the lametable memories of Malaya and Arakan.

I believe that if Wingate is properly managed, allowed to choose his officers and evolve his plan, he will do big things in Burma.

Bitter experience has proved that orthodox methods will not beat the Japs. Wingate, who nevertheless has a solid military education behind him, has become a

specialist in the unorthodox. He is ready to "try anything."

After all, a lot of people said his Burma expedition was "a suicide show." But Wingate is not one of your hare-brained adventurers.

"You know," he told me, with his strange smile "I'm not half so crazy as some people think."

Every now and then Britain throws up a man like this. Sometimes he becomes a man of destiny. It was thus with Clive of India. It may be so with this man Wingate. He may become the "Clive of Burma."

All I hope is that he will be given the chance.

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